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Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Speech 10

Claiborne Pell

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, I rise in full support of this amendment. To my mind, the issue here is whether our society deems our culture important enough to spend a small portion of one percent of our budget to support it. The National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities are a declaration of faith in our national future, an assertion of pride in the uniqueness of American creativity. The tiny federal support for the arts and scholarship makes a statement to our citizens, our private donors, and to all other nations that the development of American culture is of value to our society. The American people are wondrously inventive, original and ingenious and consequentially our culture and scholarship is remarkably vibrant and dynamic. The evidence supports the fact that Americans from every walk of life, from every economic level, strongly desire and seek access to cultural events in their communities for themselves and for their children. Yet, as concluded by many scholars and economists, in every society the arts and humanities have historically required a strong coalition of government, corporations and private patrons for their continued vigor. The NEA provides that all important leverage for support of cultural achievements.

The legislation before us would slash funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities below the threshold of effectiveness in furthering the development of American cultural life. Many Americans simply do not have access to their own culture. The Endowments provide that access for millions of our citizens all across the country, Americans who would otherwise not be able to hear a symphony orchestra concert, see a theatrical production or experience a great museum exhibit.

The NEA and NEH are a testament to the continuing development of our unique culture, to our enduring faith in our own creativity and to our world leadership in artistic achievement. Our national culture is extraordinarily vigorous and diverse -- our national cultural agencies support, encourage and enhance its vibrancy. This amendment would still leave a 30% cut to these agencies. I hope that my colleagues will support this very modest amendment.